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## Approaching an Understanding of Arts and Cultural Managers as Intercultural Brokers

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Kristin Oswald,  
Chief Online Editor

## An entirely new Arts Management

### Content:

*Culture and the Arts: What for?*, by Maria Vlachou  
- [Page 3](#)

*Designing Inclusion. Cultural Policies empowered by digital and real Audiences*, by Petya Koleva - [Page 9](#)

*How Globalization effects Cultural Management*, by Raphaella Henze - [Page 19](#)

*Approaching an Understanding of Arts and Cultural Managers as Intercultural Brokers*, by Victoria Durrer, Raphaella Henze and Ina Ross - [Page 25](#)

*Opera singer career startup. Welcome to personal entrepreneurship*, by Zenaida des Aubris - [Page 31](#)

*Book preview: Introduction to International Arts Management*, by Raphaella Henze - [Page 36](#)

## Editorial

Dear reader,

Societies worldwide are currently facing far-reaching and often challenging developments. And although intensive connections and exchange between cultures and nations are part of world history as long as anyone can remember, globalisation is surely the current development that affects us the most. Digitisation, migration, new up winds for nationalisation and overcome value systems, and the conflicts that arise from these tendencies are all closely connected to it.

Although we see the consequences of these developments in the media everyday, they seem to be pretty abstract and far away for most of us, at least in the western world. But shall we just keep watching until they actually knock at our doors? Shouldn't we already have started to prepare ourselves for the changes they will bring for our daily and our work lives? For us at Arts Management Network, it's the arts that should anticipate such developments at first glance, make clear that their origins are deeply rooted in the behaviour of the western societies and of everyone of us.

For sure, every country's arts sector has its peculiarities. But just like these developments influence most countries of the world, they also influence their arts organisations, artists and arts managers. So how can we react to them? What can we do to make the best of the new circumstances and to help the societies we live in handle them? If artists and art organisations shall use their creative potential to reflect these questions and the possible outcomes of current changes, they first have to reflect themselves. By reacting early to upcoming changes and seeing transformation as a constant companion, they may become able to develop entirely new strategies instead of just trying to improve the old ones. And by becoming more flexible and act proactive instead of reactive, it will get much easier to answer fundamental questions like: what competencies and knowledge will arts managers need in the future? And what new tasks and issues will art organisations have to deal with?

As a platform for international arts management, we always try to take a glance beyond sectorial and national borders. What we see is that arts associations and organisations in the different world regions are discussing exactly these issues. Sometimes they are finding the same and sometimes to-

**An entirely new Arts Management**

tally different answers. But what strikes most is that the most successful organisations are not the ones with the biggest budget, but the ones that react early to changes, see them as opportunities instead of threats and try to find creative solutions that fit their individual situation, special needs and local characteristics. For us, these examples are ambassadors of the visionary, exemplary and cutting-edge arts sector we dedicate our work to.

Suiting the changing circumstances and our ten-year anniversary, we at Arts Management Network felt that it was time to rethink our understanding of the function of the arts in the different societies and regions of the world. For that reason, we invited you to tell us about your vision of “an entirely new Arts Management”. In this issue of Arts Management Quarterly – that you until now may have known as the Arts Management Newsletter – we are happy to finally present you this selection of approaches on today’s tasks of cultural management in all parts of the world. They are dealing with novel, problem-solving oriented perspectives, organizational performances, or trends like new forms of participation and cooperation. All together, they draw a picture of the palpable role that art and arts leaders can play for the world’s societies and in the future.

We hope that they will inspire you as much as they did us. And if so, we would be happy if you’d share your ideas – or maybe further approaches – with us as well.

Sincerely yours,

**Kristin Oswald (editor), Dirk Schütz (CEO) and the team of Arts Management Network**



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## Approaching an Understanding of Arts and Cultural Managers as Intercultural Brokers

Our current context of internationalisation, globalisation, and the increasing global migration presents challenges and opportunities for the arts and cultural sector. With creative and aesthetic expressions inherently reflective of cultural ideas, knowledge and values, arts and cultural managers have a significant role to play in directing, administering and mediating intercultural understanding. This refers to the ability to know, accept, value, and empathise with alternative perspectives and perceptions of the world (Marginson and Sawir, 2011; Perry and Southwell, 2011).

By Victoria Durrer, Raphaela Henze and Ina Ross

Still, very little is understood about the historical, institutional and social dimensions of these processes within the field of arts and cultural management (Hesmondalgh and Saha, 2013, p187). At the same time, there is research available in other fields of study – postcolonial, cultural, history, cultural policy and higher education studies – that have much to contribute to building our understanding of these processes (Ahmed, 2012; Marginson and Sawir, 2011; Bennett, 2001). After having met for the first time at the conference ‘Cultural Management without Borders’ at Heilbronn University in January 2015, we set about to establish an interdisciplinary and international network with the goal to bring diverse international researchers and practitioners in arts and cultural management together with those from other disciplines. By fostering exchange of research and practice, we hope that members of the network can collectively explore topics important in the intercultural context of arts and cultural management.

Here, we set out to explain why we feel these efforts are necessary. The critical discourse on arts and cultural management practice that the latest research studies by Henze (2015; 2016) proved to be urgently needed, requires deep reflection and analysis of the conventional structures, terminology, institutions, and habits employed within the field (Devereaux, 2009). For the sake of reducing complexity, this paper will only focus on how the understanding of cultural institutions differs in various cultural contexts. Museums will be taken as an example of a research field that needs further reflection from both academia and practice. Specifically, museums from countries that are referred to as economically, politically, and culturally ‘emerging powers’, where there is a growing interest in arts and cultural management, will be considered.

### ... Approaching an Understanding of Arts and Cultural Managers as Inter-cultural Brokers



INA ROSS

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#### The Museum 'Tradition'

The origins of cultural institutions like the museum can be traced back to early modern Europe where collections were argued to present the 'best' art of a society or exotic artefacts collected from 'other' societies and thus stood as representations of national power and pride as well as political virtue (Graham et al. 2000; Durrer, 2008). In the 'global South', many of these institutions are imported: either introduced by former colonial rulers or set up after decolonisation and again modelled on institutions in the western hemisphere (see MacKenzie, 2009; Kreps, 2006; Jain, 2009). Referring to India, writer and Nobel laureate V.S. Naipaul describes such institutions as being 'borrowed' and dominating the political and cultural landscape (Naipaul, V.S. 2002: 8). Thus countries like China, India, Pakistan, Myanmar or Indonesia all have 'national museums' – a concept typical of 19th and early 20th century Europe (Knell and Aronsson, et al. 2011).

Cultural institutions in what was formerly and derogatively called the 'Third World' can therefore appear familiar to those based in the western hemisphere. The sometimes-deceptive impression of familiarity is reinforced by the meta-narratives attached to cultural institutions. Under the influence of the anti-colonial discourse, for instance, the museum in India is understood primarily as an instrument for nation building (Guha-Thakurta, 2003; Mathur and Singh, 2015). Visitors of a museum in a provincial capital in central India came up with a broad range of views of what they think a museum is (some explained a zoo or a hill station to the interviewer as museum). This is also true of the theatre. For example, in 2005, the Theatre India magazine devoted a special issue to the question of "How 'National' is our National Theatre?" (Theatre India 11, 2005). As referenced above, these perspectives are easily understood in the West and have parallels in the history of European culture and ideology.

#### Standard Ideas about Professionalisation

This familiarity seems to result in efforts to exchange and 'professionalise' arts and cultural management practices in imbalanced ways. The suggestion is that western arts and cultural management and marketing strategies and practices can be transferred, which risks ignoring the specificities of local cultural contexts and practices (Dewey and Wyszomirski, 2004; see also Arts Management Quarterly 122, 2015). This phenomenon is well known in business approaches adopted by multinational corporations, which often treat emerging markets as "developed markets in their infancy" (Bijapurkar, 2009: 8). Rather than engaging in a more nuanced cultural understanding of consumption in these economies, such approaches pejoratively view and address these customers as being 20 years 'behind' American or European consumers in their needs and habits. Similarly, a museum in Asia or Africa is typically viewed as needing to be 'brought up' to a level in line with the most recent stage of western modernity.



### ... Approaching an Understanding of Arts and Cultural Managers as Inter-cultural Brokers



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Ongoing research by Ina Ross (a visitor survey including about 80 interviews in Hindi and English and a guest book and visitor observation in two Indian museums, the Madhya Pradesh Tribal Museum in Bhopal and the National Museum in New Delhi) demonstrates how increasing financial prosperity in countries like India, for example, has led to the emergence of many new private arts and cultural initiatives and enterprises that are working to 'professionalise' arts and cultural management practice.

In this context, visitor numbers, marketing and management have increasingly come into focus, matched with greater efforts to foster a more standardised style of arts and cultural management practice. The Indian government has appointed a steering committee by which representatives from different arts and cultural institutions and private initiatives are exploring how arts management strategies might be implemented in organisations (Zuberi, 2015). Yet, arts and cultural management is still rarely taught in universities with academic efforts largely emphasising heritage management (e.g. the Centre of Heritage Management, Ahmedabad University). As a new career path being actively discussed and explored in India, management consultants, organisations and experts from Anglophone and European countries see a market emerging for developing arts management practice. Often acting on behalf of, or in cooperation with, diplomatic cultural institutions present in the respective countries (e.g. the Goethe-Institut or the British Council), actors like Art Think SouthAsia (ATSA) or Strategic Management in the Art of Theatre (SMART) have begun supporting and influencing endeavours to standardise arts and cultural management practice and education in India.



The facade (left) and the exhibition (right) of the new Madhya Pradesh Tribal Museum. © Ina Ross

### An Imbalanced Exchange

This resulting exchange highlights how our historical understanding of the development and professionalisation of arts and cultural management in both practice and education is often geopolitically informed and thus gives rise to some interesting problems and questions (Hernández-Acosta, 2013; Boylan,

**... Approaching an Understanding of Arts and Cultural Managers as Intercultural Brokers**

2000). We need to be cognisant that such approaches do not fail to take into account the possibility that these ‘non-western’ institutions are not at all deficient, but actually different – in terms of what they try to achieve as well as how they try to achieve it.

Our conversations in Heilbronn in January 2015 reflected upon how those of us practicing in the western hemisphere too often assume they ‘know’ what cultural institutions are, how they should be managed, and what those visiting them need and want. In fact, our knowledge is indeed very limited, maybe even Eurocentric. At the same time, we have been presented with an incredible opportunity to learn from one another’s perspectives and practices. Rather than simply impose outside solutions, which assume that different cultural viewpoints of arts and culture, and specifically arts and cultural management practice and institutional structures, are simply transferrable between cultures, we need to develop greater balance of knowledge exchange.

With funding support from the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the UK, we are thus establishing an international research and knowledge sharing network entitled ‘Brokering Intercultural Exchange: Interrogating the Role of Arts and Cultural Management’. We aim to generate knowledge and case studies in the field of arts and cultural management that can serve both academics and researchers who explore and engage in relationships and working practices across and between cultures and nations. Activities will involve meeting in person in several sessions in different locations in 2017 as well as an online platform for wider dissemination of ideas and findings. We hope to involve potential participants through calls for papers and to provide workshops and talks as well as results online. By bringing researchers and arts and cultural managers, educators, and students together with policymakers and artists to engage in intercultural dialogue, we can begin to reveal and investigate the complexity of our experiences, traditions, and terminology. We hope this will assist in developing policies, practices and pedagogies that foster new value of alternative cultural perspectives.

We very much look forward to getting in touch with all those interested in developing a more intercultural understanding of arts and cultural management. More updates on our activities will be provided on [artsmanagement.net](http://artsmanagement.net) in due course. ¶

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**... Approaching an Understanding of Arts and Cultural Managers as Intercultural Brokers**

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